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## Adult Education and the Challenges of the 21st Century in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Adult education is expected to address the socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental problems besieging humanity in their various societies. This is so because adults are the major occupants of the production sectors of the economy. Unfortunately, the goals of adult education as stated by the federal government in the National Policy on Education, have not been properly achieved. Changes and developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century call for a total review and overhaul of adult education. This paper makes a case that changes brought in by globalization and exposition in knowledge brought about through information and communication technology and the need for global peace and harmony in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, make a review and overhaul of adult education inevitable. The paper recommends that innovations in adult education should among other things improve and retain adult education profession as well as make adult learners become conscious of changes around him.

**Key words:** Adult, Adult education and challenges.

### Introduction

Education remains the key to human development. It is seen as the driving force for meaningful developments in every human society. The goal of any educational system is to provide or develop a balanced individual capable of surviving in his environment and contributing meaningfully towards the survival of that society to which he belongs. Adult education is one of the principal professions that can take adequate care of socio-economic, cultural political and environmental problems of the adults. The success of adult education in terms of achieving its goals as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) cannot be over-emphasized. Adult education changes the social and psychological minds of adults more than any other profession, instills lost hope in them and liberates them from their prejudice of seeing themselves as not beings that are capable of learn. Adult education awakens adult learners to become aware of their environmental (social, economic, cultural and political) and psychological potentials and hidden abilities. It also exerts enormous influence on the larger society in terms of national development. Adult education continues from where the teacher in the formal school system who rigorously inculcates in the individual the desire for knowledge, understanding and education stops. Fasokun (2006) observes that:

*Adult education is concerned not with preparing people for life, but rather with helping/assisting people (adults) to live more successfully as useful and acceptable members of their societies and contribute meaningfully to the development of those societies.*

Adult education educates adult learners who are parents/guardians on the better ways of managing the available resources to achieve socio-political and economic success in their life endeavours and also make referrals which assist other individual personalities and institutions in dealing with human problems as well as the society in which they find themselves. Adult education stands between the adult learner, the community and policy makers in human societies so much than any other professional. The adult educator knows the problems which inhibit effective adult teaching/learning and effective administration of adult education industry. Adult education is the only profession that assists adult learners effectively in their efforts to learn. Okafor (1991:32) states that:

*Thorough knowledge of the basic principles of teaching and learning and the skills to apply those principles in teaching/learning situation, adequate knowledge of the learner and the factors that determine the quality of the learner's response in the educative process, adequate knowledge of the value constructs that motivate the learner and the capacity to assist the learner to acquire essential attitudes and modify negative ones.*

The above assertion reveals that adult education is a unique profession. Unlike every other profession adult education deals with “adult human materials” and environmental problems which give the individual a feeling of joy, fascination, pride and enthusiasm. Unlike other professionals, working with “adults” establishes enduring and infectious impressions which engenders in adult learners the practical realization of theoretical formulations inherent in adult education. Unfortunately, the adult educator in adult literacy centres receives meager pay which is not commensurate with services rendered, works in dilapidated and unstimulating environment without the necessary teaching/learning facilities. The adult educator suffers stress, insults and violence from this clientele and government in handling adult education programme. This makes him feels disappointed in his profession. Nnazor (2005) observes that Adult education programmes continue to operate mainly as disparate, peacemeal activities that are not integrated into coherent purposeful strategy in pursuit of a relatively development vision. All these in a way consistently truncate adult education profession. The adult educator feels bad as a result of his genuine commitment to do good by transforming his learners and consciously making the society a better place for living. The consequence of all these is that adult education had suffered devaluation which makes people develop a low sense of esteem especially when compared with other professions like medicine, law, engineering etc.

In the face of all this, adult education and its environment in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is generally faced with challenges. Adult education has been neglected by the government irrespective of the fact that it is the adult personnel of this country who are already at the production sectors and who will eventually transform this country from what it is today to achieve its developmental target of 7-point agenda of the late Umar Musa Y’ardua. Maduka (2010) makes the same observation.

The objectives of Adult Education are not achievable in an environment where majority of the nation’s population especially the adults who are in the production sectors of the economy are illiterates. Nzeneri (2010) observes that illiteracy is associated with underdevelopment, instability, low productivity, low income, poor health, high poverty and mortality rates. It is the recognition of these ills that a one time chairman of National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education in Nigeria, Eke (1992) succinctly puts it that:

*A cursory look at the political climate of the world shows clearly that regions of mass illiteracy are generally regions of instability, economic and political underdevelopment. Economically, an illiterate is on the periphery, politically he is completely in the dark.*

Late President Umaru Musa Yar’ Adua presented vision 2020 as his developmental target which uses the invigorating ideas of the well advertised 7-point agenda to project a future in which Nigeria will be among the twenty most industrialized nations of the world, (Maduka 2010).

The human race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century looks up to Adult Education system for right answers to the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the key for Adult Education to make positive responses lies in the quality of Adult Education professionals available to the people. This paper canvasses for a review of Adult Education in Nigeria for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Overview**

The promises and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century run into volumes. Such promises and challenges can be reduced to a simple sentence of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a mix bag. Nzeneri (2010) clearly stated that:

*Our 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by an upsurge of information technology which dictates the pace of development and surely we have not stopped talking about technological transfer. A century where communication and infrastructural facilities such as telephones, fax and computer networking are tools that are turning our world into a global village, where classrooms may no longer play prominent roles as major access to education.*

From the above information, it is clear that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed tremendous successes and breakthroughs in virtually all areas of human endeavours. In medicine for instance, breakthrough has been recorded in providing drugs and vaccines for treating severe cases of sicknesses like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and poliomyelitis which had seemed impossible prior to this time.

Explosions of ideas and knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have made it possible for the exploration of space and marine environments for sustainable development of mankind.

Also inventions in technology have removed certain barriers in space and time as people can communicate, travel, market goods and services some kilometers away from where they are within minutes. The internet has been beneficial in mobilizing people globally at the grassroots to take a common stand on global issues of common concern. Igbo (2008:49) observes that:

*Adult education is an instrument for helping the active population worldwide with Information Communication Technology (ICT), which is a decisive tool for the smooth integration of Nigerian economy in the global economy.*

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has opened up more opportunities for people to venture into areas that were before now classified as no go areas. Nzeneri (2010) succinctly viewed that our 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by an upsurge in information communication technology which dictates the pace of development and, surely we have not stopped talking about technological transfer.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century through adults' education should open more opportunities for adult education to venture into those no go areas. The physically challenged adults and volatile youths should be given a sense of belonging just like other individuals. Yesterday it was the problem of youth being restive in the Niger Delta region and kidnapping all over the country. Today, it is the problem of Boko Haram bombings and killing of thousand of innocent citizens and destroying property in the Northern part of the country.

So far, it can be deduced that a review of adult education in Nigeria can provide a bridge and veritable platform through which the promises and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be adequately addressed.

### **Adult Education**

The definition of Adult Education at this point, becomes necessary to make this discussion intelligent, and clearly identify the basic issues that are examined in this discourse. Adult education as a concept is one most difficult to define. Yet we see people define it from different perspectives. Most writers seem to agree that adult education is the education geared towards the adult. This gives rise to the question "who is an adult".

An adult as a concept, just like adult education, has been defined by many different authors and writers from different perspectives. Some use the biological parameter in defining it, while others use the chronological, historical, economic, psychological, political and social parameters in defining who an adult is. One may ask "what then can be said about the concept of an adult"? (Bown, 1979 and Ibeh, 2008) see an adult as one who has achieved full physical development and is expected to have the right to participate as a responsible homemaker, worker and member of a society. Nzeneri (2010) perceives an adult as a person who is physically and psychologically mature, and the individual is socially, economically, politically, culturally and environmentally responsible. Looking at the above definitions of an adult, two key words exist, which are maturity and responsibility. He also informs that in advanced countries an adult is one who has attained the voting age of twenty-one (21) years and more, while in developing country like Nigeria, he is one who has attained the voting age of 18 years.

In order to avoid disparities that exist in different various definitions, UNESCO (1976) gives a recommendation of who an adult is: it is as a person regarded as such by society to which he/she belongs. From this recommendation of UNESCO, we may now see the definition of who an adult is as culture referenced. It depends on who a particular society considers to be an adult in that society.

Adult education, just like who as adult is, has varied definitions from different authorities and writers. However, UNESCO in her international conference in Nairobi, Kenya, (1976) as reported in Nzeneri (2010:10) defines adult education as:

*The entire body of organized educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two fold perspectives of full personal development*

*and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.*

The above definition is broad and encompassing in the sense that it does not only define adult education but it also defines its content and scope.

Simply put, adult education is the education (formal, informal and non-formal) given to any person regarded as an adult by society in order to socially, economically, and culturally improve and empower him/her, so that the person will be able to contribute meaningfully as a useful and the acceptable member of society. It is education based on the needs of the adult.

One universally acknowledged truth is that adult education proffers solutions to all human problems. It also offers a great deal of socio-economic, cultural, political and environmental opportunities to people. Adult education provides employers in different sectors of the economy with qualified and sustainable skills and manpower which service the economy and provide basis for rewarding the adult members. In the words of a one time Director General of UNESCO as reported in Omolewa (1985:1):

*It is not the children of today who hold the present destiny of Africa in their hands, it is the adults. So, it is only by establishing effective communication with the adult population, by helping them to adjust to a rapidly changing world, that an immediate impact can be made on urgent problems of society and essential progress to be brought about.*

This view is very true because it is the adults who occupy the production sectors of our economy not children who by their education are for the future. Adult education has been deployed to solving different situational problems in different societies of the world. Eheazu (1998) is in agreement with this situation when he maintains that:

*Strongest and desirable role Adult Education can and does play is in redressing injustice, deprivations, and oppression suffered by victims of pseudo-equalitarianism and insincerity of purpose in the provision made for the general good in education training and functional learning.*

With the world becoming a global village, adult education helps to breakdown stereotype ideas and reduces prejudice, injustice, deprivation and oppression. By implication, this means that adult education in addition to being a tool for global peace and harmony makes the educated adults to be more sophisticated and polished in their chosen profession. Farhey (2010) observes that: "people who are more educated know why they are not supposed to make prejudice comments and consequently disguise their prejudices". Adult education should be geared towards solving the problem of injustice, deprivation and oppression which will in turn bring peace and harmony among adult members of the country. It will solve these current problems of kidnapping, youth restiveness and indiscriminate bombings in the country.

#### **Fundamental Requirements for Adult Education in 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The purpose of adult and non-formal education according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) includes:

- i. To provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or (dropouts)...These include the nomads, migrant families, the disable, and the disadvantaged gender.
- ii. To provide functional and remedial education for those who did not complete secondary education.
- iii. To present education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
- iv. To provide in-service, on-the-job, vocational and professional trainings for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
- v. To give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural, and civic education for public enlightenment.

As laudable as the above can be, adult education has not succeeded in achieving the above objectives. Adult education should be re-positioned to excessively launch the present adults into the

orbit where they can respond to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and make meaningful contributions to national development.

Policy makers and the planners of adult education programmes in Nigeria need to incorporate into adult education those innovations which have made the 21<sup>st</sup> century unique. A fundamental requirement which adult education programme planners need to incorporate into its schedule is the knowledge and practice of information and communication technology. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized with exposition of knowledge and hi-technology which has aided development in different sectors. A century where communication and infrastructural facilities such as telephones fax and computer networkings are tools that are turning the world into a global village. Virtually, all sectors of human endeavour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have become technology driven. This has resulted in a shift from “industrial era to information era”. Synonymous with the century is its ability to reach people irrespective of distance, introduce changes to human problems.

Adult education should not lag behind in this era of information and communication technology and knowledge exposition. A foundation value which adult education should incorporate and integrate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century programme is adult education which is capable of educating the adult members of the Nigerian community a culture of peace and harmony. In recent past, events in some states show that educational institutions where we have our youths and young adults have turned out to be breeding grounds for violence and educated adult elites employ the services of these young adults to execute assassination of opponents, rig elections, rape, kidnap and lead rebellious gangs, commit fraud and pen robbery etc. These are some of the actions which adult education, which is purely for liberation, development and peace should challenge. The challenge of poor public perception of adult education is considered another serious challenge of adult education in Nigeria. The poor public image of adult education field as an area of study for the old people is undoubtedly partly responsible for its low patronage as a discipline in Nigerians Universities (Aruma 2011). There must be adequate information about adult education in order to stimulate significant interests of people in the field as an important area of study that offers many opportunities to people. Pratt and Boyden (1985) in Aruma (2011) view that publicity for literacy education promotes successful literacy programme in society.

Another issue of fundamental importance which needs to be addressed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that proper attention should be given to adult education by the three tiers of government in line with the global concern for eradication of illiteracy. There should be a holistic approach to adult education. The three tiers of government should allocate adequate finance to adult education programme especially literacy and continuing education programmes because we cannot make progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where we have a nation where children and their adult parents are illiterate. We cannot achieve the objectives of Education For All (EFA) without having almost everyone especially the adult populace literate. Among this group are nomads and migrant fishermen etc.

Government should as well provide adequate funds to take care of adult literacy including the little stipend for instructors, which constitute serious disincentive for regular attendance in adult literacy classes. Also, the issue of lack of adequate instructional materials and qualified personnel to handle adult literacy centres should be addressed.

Finally, it must be emphasized that overhaul in adult education in general is very essential for the generation and sustainability of new knowledge that can be in harmony with globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Conclusion

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has better prospects for adult education to move forward with globalization trends. This is true because the key to the development of any nation lies in the quality of adults that nation has. It is the adults who will transform the nation, not the children. Therefore adult education must be a pacesetter to other professions in developmental drive of any nation. There should be a radical overhaul of adult education programmes which is committed with global trends.



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